



SPOE Administration Manual

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Office of Childhood
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FIRST STEPS SPOE ADMINISTRATION MANUAL

The State of Missouri's Office of Administration contracts with agencies to serve as the System Point of Entry (SPOE) that operates the First Steps program within each of the 10 regions of the state. Each agency designates one SPOE Contractor who is responsible for implementing the contract awarded by the State of Missouri. The state agency responsible for managing the SPOE contract is the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The SPOE agency is responsible for all administration and service coordination for the region awarded, including child find, public awareness, referral, intake, eligibility determination, and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) activities for eligible children. Each year DESE reviews a set of contract standards to determine the SPOE agency's performance within the region, which include the following:

- **Child Count Standard.** The SPOE must attain and maintain a child count within a specified range individualized to each region, as determined by DESE.
- **Compliance Standard.** The SPOE must follow the federal and state guidelines. The SPOE must correct all identified non-compliance resulting from a yearly compliance monitoring.
- **Early Intervention Teams (EIT) Standard.** The SPOE must utilize the First Steps transdisciplinary team approach to IFSP service provision, referred to as EIT, which includes teams of providers with the following disciplines: occupational therapy, physical therapy, service coordination, speech language/pathology and special instruction.
- **IFSP Meeting Activities.** The SPOE must comply with all requirements for holding and completing IFSP meetings. The SPOE Director must ensure that all data entry for IFSP meetings is finalized within 14 calendar days from the date of the IFSP meeting.
- **Needs Assessment Plan.** The SPOE must conduct an annual needs assessment of EIT and the SPOE operation model for the region. The purpose of the needs assessment is to identify the strengths and challenges in the region, as well as, to identify any training or technical assistance for the Service Coordinators and service providers in the region.
- **Attend State Agency Events.** The SPOE must attend all required state agency meetings, trainings and events.

If the SPOE agency does not meet at least minimum performance standards for the standards listed above, then the SPOE agency pays DESE liquidated damages in an amount equal to one-tenth of a percent (.001) of the total annual contract amount for each standard not met during the contract period that the standard was not met.

The SPOE agency may receive an incentive if the response rate for the region assigned to the annual family survey increases two percent over the previous year. The first year of the contract establishes the baseline standard, therefore the incentive is not applicable during the first year of the contract. If the SPOE agency meets the minimum performance standard then DESE pays an

incentive in an amount equal to one-tenth of a percent (.001) of the total annual contract amount. For more information on the family survey, see Section IV: Activities with the State Agency.

SECTION I: SPOE OPERATIONS

Each SPOE agency must employ one full-time program administrator for the region, known as the SPOE Director. The role of the SPOE Director is critical to the success of the SPOE contract. The SPOE Director manages the day-to-day operations of the region including office administration activities, supervising staff, identifying and assisting families of eligible children, working with enrolled providers, networking with community partners, and collaborating with school districts.

A. SPOE Office

Each SPOE agency must have a physical administrative office located within the designated region. The office must meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. The SPOE office must be staffed and accessible via phone during normal business hours (e.g., 8:00 am to 4:30 pm) to accept referrals, phone inquiries and be accessible to the community.

The SPOE may post an external sign, as appropriate, to identify the office as a regional First Steps SPOE office. The SPOE is required to use the First Steps logo for any signs or banners used to identify the First Steps office.

The First Steps logo is trademarked by DESE. Authorized use of the First Steps logo is only available to the SPOE for specific activities outlined below; otherwise, prior approval must be provided by DESE, in writing, before the SPOE uses the First Steps logo.

➤ Authorized Use of the First Steps Logo

The SPOE is authorized to use the First Steps logo, and does not need to get permission, for the following activities:

- Business cards identifying SPOE staff
- Letters/envelopes when conducting official First Steps business
- Name or photo badges for SPOE staff

For all other situations (i.e., agency brochures or correspondence not specifically related to First Steps, miscellaneous office supplies, clothing, etc.), the SPOE is not authorized to use the First Steps logo and must obtain prior approval from DESE in writing before using the logo.

B. SPOE Staff

The SPOE agency determines the most efficient operation for service coordination in a particular region in order to complete required referral, intake, eligibility determination and IFSP activities.

1. SPOE Director

The SPOE Director manages the day-to-day operations of the region including supervising personnel, assisting families of eligible children, working with enrolled providers, collaborating with school districts, and networking with community partners. The SPOE Director and the DESE Senior Program Specialist meet regularly to review SPOE data and discuss administrative activities in order to plan training and professional development for the region.

a) Data System

The SPOE Director works with the Central Finance Office (CFO) to enroll all required SPOE personnel with access to the electronic data system known as WebSPOE. For more information on the required WebSPOE enrollment forms, see SPOE Administration Manual - Service Coordinator Enrollment Forms.

SPOE personnel are not allowed to share their unique username and password or answers to the security questions with anyone else. When SPOE personnel log into WebSPOE with their username and password, the system generates a record of any data entered or pages viewed by that user, which is why it is critical for the person who logged in to be the same person who completed the data entry activities.

If a SPOE employee with access to WebSPOE leaves employment, then the SPOE Director notifies the CFO immediately to inactivate the employee's WebSPOE account after all meetings have been finalized. The SPOE Director sends an email to the CFO (mofsenroll@gainwelltechnologies.com) indicating the Service Coordinator's enrollment needs to be inactivated and attaches the *Service Coordinator Information and Online Access Form* indicating "Delete Access".

b) Staff Oversight and Training

The SPOE Director establishes a training plan for new Service Coordinators to ensure understanding of the First Steps philosophy and the functions of the Service Coordinator position as it relates to the transdisciplinary service model. The training plan may include shadowing other Service Coordinators, reviewing the First Steps Practice Manual and WebSPOE training.

The SPOE Director is not permitted to maintain a regular ongoing caseload. However, in the event of staff leave or turnover, the SPOE Director may conduct service coordination activities on a limited, short-term basis.

Additionally, the SPOE Director provides oversight/training as needed to ensure the Service Coordinators and administrative staff are properly trained and supervised. The SPOE Director works with the Senior Program Specialist for the assigned region to identify training needs, develop and implement training. Monthly staff meetings, weekly communication or other methods may be used by the SPOE Director to support Service Coordinators and administrative staff.

c) Needs Assessment

Each year the SPOE Director develops a needs assessment plan for the assigned region. The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to assess early intervention teaming and the SPOE operation model. The results of the Needs Assessment help to identify the strengths and challenges and any related training and technical assistance needed for Service Coordinators in the region. The focus of the needs assessment is Service Coordinator practices, not compliance.

The SPOE Director must conduct and report on Service Coordinators observations utilizing the tool designated by DESE (e.g., the Family Assessment Interview and IFSP Meeting Observation Tool). The SPOE Director works with the assigned Senior Program Specialist throughout the fiscal year to plan and develop the region's activities and written report.

Each year DESE provides a needs assessment template to assist the SPOE Director with the written report. By December 15th of each year, the SPOE Director submits a proposed needs assessment plan to the Senior Program Specialist. Once the proposed plan is approved, the SPOE begins to implement the plan.

By April 30th of each year, the SPOE Director submits a draft report of the results to the Senior Program Specialist. A final needs assessment report is submitted to the First Steps Program Manager by June 15th each year. The final report includes the results of needs assessment activities and any training or technical assistance needed from the Senior Program Specialists. DESE compiles the regional results of observations into a statewide summary that is part of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), an annual report on improving child outcomes that DESE submits to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education (OSEP).

2. Service Coordinator

The SPOE agency is responsible for employing all Service Coordinators for the First Steps program. The SPOE agency must identify Service Coordinators who meet the minimum qualifications as outlined in the Personnel Standards for First Steps Providers (see Service Provider Manual Chapter 1: Provider Enrollment).

The SPOE Director works with the Central Finance Office (CFO) to enroll the Service Coordinator on the Public Directory, which includes access to the electronic data system, WebSPOE. The Service Coordinator completes all required First Steps module training prior to being assigned a caseload. For more information on the required enrollment forms, see SPOE Administration Manual Service Coordinator Enrollment Forms.

Service Coordinators provide the vital link between families, early intervention services, and the SPOE office. Service Coordinators must be knowledgeable of First Steps compliance

standards and best practices.

a) Lead Service Coordinator

The SPOE may utilize a Lead Service Coordinator to provide assistance to the SPOE Director with oversight and training of Service Coordinators, in addition to carrying a caseload. This position may also enroll with the CFO as a Case Administrator in order to have access to all child records in the region. The Lead Service Coordinator should have leadership and management skills as well as knowledge of First Steps compliance, best practices and WebSPOE.

b) Team Coordinator

The SPOE may utilize a Team Coordinator to provide assistance to the SPOE Director with recruiting providers, managing provider complaints, training, maintaining Early Intervention (EI) examiner list, managing EIT composition, and preparing for and facilitating EIT meetings, in addition to carrying a caseload. This position may also enroll with the CFO as a Case Administrator in order to have access to all EIT and child records in the region. The Team Coordinator should have leadership and management skills as well as knowledge of First Steps compliance, best practices and WebSPOE.

3. Secretary

Each SPOE office must have at least one secretary/administrative staff member who can assist the SPOE Director with the operation of the SPOE. This position enrolls with the CFO as a Case Administrator in order to have access to all child records in the region. The secretary may assist with customer contact activities (e.g., phone, email and mail) **such as accepting referrals**, filing and document preparation. The secretary must be knowledgeable about the First Steps program in order to respond to phone calls, and general questions from the public in a timely manner.

4. Data Entry

The SPOE may utilize data entry staff to provide assistance to Service Coordinators with required data entry and record keeping activities. This position enrolls with the CFO as a Case Administrator in order to have access to all child records in the region. Data entry staff must be knowledgeable of the web-based child data system (i.e., WebSPOE) and the First Steps process, including timelines.

5. Temporary Personnel

As permitted by DESE, the SPOE may utilize temporary personnel to provide services such as family contacts/scheduling, filing, document preparation, data entry, record destruction, assistive technology inventory services, and other data entry-type services. This position may enroll with the CFO as a Case Administrator in order to have access to all child records in the region. Temporary personnel can provide support to Service Coordinators or office staff but temporary personnel cannot conduct sole service coordination activities by him/herself (e.g., intake visit, IFSP meeting). Consideration of the use of temporary personnel services is determined each year and at the sole discretion of DESE.

SECTION II: REGIONAL OVERSIGHT

The SPOE Director is responsible for overseeing not only the daily operations of the local office, but all aspects of the First Steps program within the region, including public awareness, child find and needs assessment. The SPOE Director meets regularly with the Senior Program Specialist to analyze regional data in order to plan training and professional development activities for the region.

A. Public Awareness

The SPOE Director maintains a public awareness system to market and promote the First Steps program throughout the region. The SPOEs public awareness plan focuses on the early identification of children who are potentially eligible for First Steps services, including the preparation and dissemination of information on the availability of First Steps services.

Public awareness activities include sharing information with other agencies who serve young children (e.g., parent education programs, Early Head Start) regarding basic First Steps information, eligibility criteria and how to make a referral.

Examples of public awareness activities may include:

- Speaking to targeted organizations/agencies regarding First Steps eligibility and referrals.
- Distributing First Steps brochures and eligibility criteria to local agencies who work with underserved populations within the region.
- Distributing First Steps brochures and eligibility criteria to medical professionals, such as neonatal units, pediatricians, family physician and children's clinics within the region.

The First Steps website has current information about the program, such as handouts, brochures and webinars to serve as resources when organizing child find and public awareness activities.

1. Regional Council Public Awareness Activities

The SPOE agency may choose to establish a Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) to assist with public awareness activities. The SPOE Director may recruit the following stakeholders to assist in the RICC: Senior Program Specialist, representatives of public school districts (e.g., parent education programs, Early Childhood Special Education), representatives of hospitals and medical community, representatives from state agencies (e.g., mental health, social services), families with children with developmental delays or disabilities, First Steps providers and members at large (e.g., Head Start, child care providers).

RICC members may not speak on behalf of the First Steps program; however, if they are part of an agency that provides First Steps services, they may speak on the behalf of that agency's policies or practices.

Depending on the structure of the RICC, the activities to plan and prepare for meetings may vary, including how frequently the council meets.

2. RICC Options

There are three options for establishing a regional council: SPOE creates own council, SPOE utilizes an outside/existing council or SPOE uses a combination of creating own council and using an outside/existing council.

a) SPOE Led Council

If the SPOE creates its own council, there are a variety of ways to create effective RICC meetings. Some suggestions include:

- Keep everyone involved and ensure each member has a role.
- Ensure the meetings are concise and well-organized.
- Use an agenda and stay on task. The SPOE Director, with assistance from the Senior Program Specialist and RICC members, develops an agenda for each meeting. A few days after the meeting, distribute minutes to reference.
- Ensure the meetings begin and end on time, and contain information or activities members would want to know.

b) Outside/Existing Council

The SPOE may consider the following options when utilizing an existing council outside of the First Steps system:

- Research existing councils in the SPOE region. The SPOE Director may identify the members on an existing council if the mission and goals of the council fit with the SPOEs priorities for regional activities.
- Introduce and explain the purpose for participating in the council meetings, including any planned public awareness activities in the region.
- Present First Steps information to the council, including mission, belief statements, eligibility criteria and service delivery model.
- Provide business cards and First Steps brochures to members who want additional information.
- Utilize the council meetings as an opportunity to listen for ways First Steps may have an active role in various public awareness events.

c) Combination Option

The SPOE may consider utilizing a combination RICC structure. The combination option consists of creating the SPOE's own council and using an outside/existing council. With this option, the SPOE must create and manage its own council for some of the required RICC meetings and also utilize an existing council for the remainder of the RICC meetings.

B. Child Find

Child Find is a continuous process of activities designed to locate, identify and evaluate all young children with disabilities who may be eligible for First Steps. The SPOE is responsible for developing, implementing, maintaining and evaluating a child find plan for the designated region.

There are several child find activities each SPOE must consider, including: increasing appropriate referrals and decreasing inappropriate referrals, ensuring a variety of primary referral sources are represented in referrals to the SPOE and ensuring the demographics of children (e.g., race/ethnicity, socio-economic status) are reflective of the population in the region. The SPOE should conduct child find activities in a manner that is visible and known throughout the region.

1. Identifying Referral Sources within the Region

The SPOE must inform primary referral sources to refer a child as soon as possible, but in no case, more than seven days after the child has been identified. The primary referral sources include:

- Hospitals, including prenatal and postnatal care facilities
- Physicians
- Parents
- Child care programs and early learning programs
- Local Educational Agencies/school districts, including parent education programs
- Public health facilities
- Other public health or social service agencies
- Other clinics and health care providers
- Public agencies and staff in the child welfare system, including foster care
- Homeless family shelters
- Domestic violence shelters and agencies

If referrals from a particular primary referral source decline over a period of time, the SPOE Director attempts to identify potential barriers and offer training or technical assistance so referrals to First Steps can resume.

2. Addressing Inappropriate Referrals

The SPOE is responsible for informing primary referral sources about the purpose of the First Steps program and eligibility criteria. If the SPOE Director identifies inappropriate referrals to First Steps, then the SPOE Director should discuss what constitutes an appropriate referral and training on First Steps eligibility criteria with that primary referral source.

SECTION III: DAILY OPERATIONS

The SPOE Director must be knowledgeable of all rules and regulations that govern the First Steps program, which guide the daily operations of the SPOE. The First Steps Practice Manual is the basis for all service coordination activities. The Practice Manual follows compliance standards, as well as best practice standards for completing the day-to-day operations of the SPOE.

The following activities are outlined in the SPOE contract and described in the Practice Manual.

A. Records

The SPOE is responsible for establishing and maintaining both a paper and electronic record for each child, regardless of the outcome of the referral (e.g., parent withdraw, child is eligible, child is ineligible).

1. Paper Record

The SPOE agency must maintain an official paper record for each child that contains the minimum documentation, as outlined in the Practice Manual. Documents with the original signatures from a parent or paper copies regarding the child (e.g., medical records) are maintained in the paper record. Documents maintained in the child's electronic record (e.g., IFSP, scanned documents) are not required to be kept in the paper record.

The paper record for each child must contain an access log to document all non-SPOE staff that access the paper record.

➤ Access List

Each SPOE must maintain, and make available for public inspection upon request, a current list of the names and positions of the employees within the SPOE office who may have access to the paper records without signing the access log.

2. Electronic Record

The SPOE agency must maintain an electronic record in WebSPOE for all children referred to the region. The electronic record is the official early intervention record containing referral, eligibility, and IFSP information. The SPOE Director follows procedures for data entry and conducts ongoing monitoring of the data system to ensure accurate and up-to-date data are available.

For more information about maintaining and sharing information in a child's record, see Practice Manual Chapter 2: Parental Rights.

B. Referral Processing

When a child is referred to the First Steps program, the SPOE Director, or designee, assigns the child to a Service Coordinator to conduct referral, intake and eligibility activities. At the time of referral, the SPOE Director also ensures the child is assigned to an EIT.

Upon the initial contact and/or intake visit with the family, the SPOE Director ensures all Service Coordinators explain the early intervention process, including voluntary participation, the First Steps philosophy, the referral process, eligibility criteria, early intervention teams, parental rights, and the system of payments. For more information about the intake visit, see Practice Manual Chapter 3: Referral, Intake and Evaluation.

1. Educational Surrogates

Each SPOE agency must designate a staff member responsible for overseeing the Educational Surrogate program in their agency. Unless notified otherwise, DESE assumes the Educational Surrogate contact person is the SPOE Director. The SPOE Director reviews a family's situation and determines if a child needs an Educational Surrogate to serve as the educational decision maker. When an Educational Surrogate is needed, the SPOE Director requests the appointment of an Educational Surrogate via DESE's web based system.

Additionally, the SPOE assists DESE with recruiting and training volunteers for Educational Surrogates, as needed. After the volunteer's responsibilities are done, the SPOE completes an Educational Surrogate Evaluation.

For more information on Educational Surrogates, see SPOE Administration Manual Links.

2. SPOE Transfers

While participating in First Steps, a child may move one or more times within the same region or across regions. When a child moves across regions, both the transferring SPOE and the receiving SPOE should work closely together to ensure a smooth transition. When the SPOE Director or Service Coordinator is notified by the family (or Children's Division if the child is in foster care) that a child is relocating within Missouri, the SPOE Director needs to find out the date the child is moving and the contact information for the location in the new SPOE region, including address and phone numbers.

When notified by a provider that a child may be moving, the Service Coordinator must first confirm with the family (or Children's Division) that the child is moving within Missouri. Until confirmed directly with the family (or Children's Division) that the child is officially moving, the SPOE Director cannot transfer the child to a new region.

The transferring SPOE should contact the receiving SPOE via email or phone to notify them of the pending transfer, including new address and anticipated move date.

If the child has a required IFSP meeting due within the next four to six weeks, then the transferring SPOE should attempt to complete the upcoming meeting with the family before the child moves. However, if the transferring SPOE is not given adequate notice of the move, then the responsibility of the upcoming IFSP meetings falls to the receiving SPOE. Best practice is for the transferring SPOE and receiving SPOE to communicate about upcoming meeting timelines.

➤ **Transition Meetings**

A Transition Plan is required for every child in First Steps. If the Service Coordinator at the transferring SPOE completed the Transition Plan IFSP meeting prior to the child relocating, then the receiving SPOE is not required to conduct another Transition Plan IFSP meeting. However, if the parent requests a Transition Conference with ECSE, and this meeting has not been held, the Service Coordinator must hold this meeting. For more information about transition, see Practice Manual Chapter 10: Transition.

Once confirmed that a child has relocated to a new SPOE region, the receiving SPOE cannot refuse the transfer for any reason.

a) Transferring the Electronic File

When the child has officially moved to the receiving SPOE, the transferring SPOE updates the child/family's address, including county, and contact information in the Family tab of the child's electronic record. Additionally, the transferring SPOE should make sure all IFSP meetings have been finalized and the case notes are all entered.

Once all data entry is complete, the transferring SPOE completes a SPOE Transfer of the child's electronic record (via the Transfer History tab) to the receiving SPOE. Once this is complete, the receiving SPOE has access to the child's record and the transferring SPOE no longer has access.

Once the receiving SPOE obtains the electronic file, the SPOE Director assigns a Service Coordinator. The Service Coordinator contacts the family, confirms new address, including school district, and works with the family to continue services in the new region. A new IFSP may be needed to learn more about the family's concerns and priorities before creating new authorizations for services.

b) Transferring the Paper File

After the electronic record has been transferred, the transferring SPOE sends the receiving SPOE the child's paper file. The transferring SPOE ensures all documents are included in the paper file. Once completed, the transferring SPOE mails the paper file to the receiving SPOE via the United States Postal Service (USPS) sent with a tracking method to ensure delivery.

The transferring SPOE should notify the receiving SPOE once the paper file has been mailed so the receiving SPOE can prepare for the file to arrive.

C. Assistive Technology Procedures

The IFSP team determines the need for assistive technology devices and services to support a child in meeting IFSP outcomes. While the SPOE Director cannot approve or deny IFSP team decisions, the SPOE Director is responsible for providing the team with guidance and oversight to ensure the First Steps philosophy and regulations are followed. For more information on assistive technology, including facilitating assistive technology discussions at an IFSP team meeting, see Practice Manual Chapter 8: Early Intervention Services.

After the IFSP team has decided on the appropriate assistive technology device and/or service, the Service Coordinator obtains parental consent for assistive technology and completes *the SPOE Assistive Technology Pricing Worksheet* (see Practice Manual Chapter 8 Documents) listing a description of the needed device, including all pertinent information such as size and modifications. The Service Coordinator submits the pricing worksheet to the SPOE Director, or other designee, for processing.

1. Obtaining Assistive Technology

The SPOE Director uses the most economical and cost effective method to obtain the assistive technology device.

a) Loan

If an appropriate item exists in inventory at the SPOE office or other location, including other SPOE offices, the SPOE Director may decide to obtain the device via loan instead of purchasing the item. The SPOE Director considers the cost of any modifications or accessories to the loaned item, as well as any shipping or transport costs. The decision to obtain the device via loan is documented in case notes and in Section 9: Team Communications in the child's IFSP.

Information on assistive technology loan programs, device recycling and exchange and web resources can be accessed through Missouri Assistive Technology (MOAT). For more information about MOAT, see SPOE Administration Manual Links.

b) Construct or Modify

If an assistive technology device is not available via loan, then the SPOE Director considers constructing or modifying a device. The SPOE Director authorizes all materials needed to construct or modify an item as the assistive technology device, and the time required for the construction or modification as the assistive technology service (i.e., the labor costs).

c) Purchase

If an assistive technology device is not available for loan, then the SPOE Director may decide to purchase the device. The IFSP team may suggest a specific item, brand name or modification, and the SPOE Director reviews the suggestion as part of the determination of the most economical method to obtain the device.

i. Obtain Quotes

If an assistive technology device can be purchased at the Medicaid rate, then the SPOE Director does not have to obtain a quote before purchasing a device. In addition, the SPOE Director does not have to obtain quotes on hearing aids.

If the device is not offered at the Medicaid rate, then the SPOE Director attempts to obtain quotes from three different assistive technology providers. The SPOE Director selects the device to purchase from the assistive technology provider offering the lowest price. The SPOE Director completes the SPOE Assistive Technology Pricing Worksheet to document the quotes obtained and the selected assistive technology provider.

If a specific device is routinely ordered, then the SPOE Director does not have to obtain a quote each time the device is ordered. The SPOE Director can document the lowest quote and continue to use the assistive technology provider offering the lowest cost. After a reasonable time period, the SPOE Director verifies the assistive technology provider continues to offer the lowest cost for the device.

ii. Cost of the Device

For assistive technology devices, First Steps pays the actual cost of the device. Actual cost of the device means the base price of the device plus any shipping and handling charges or mark-up, which may not exceed 25% of the base price.

iii. SPOE as Provider

When purchasing assistive technology devices as SPOE as Provider, the SPOE Director may have difficulty authorizing the exact cost of the device due to variance in shipping charges or taxes.

In order to alleviate underestimating the total cost of an item, the SPOE Director can enter an additional amount to the cost of an assistive technology device, but this cannot exceed 10% of the total cost of the item. The SPOE Director then claims the exact amount as listed on the invoice for the device.

For example, if the item costs \$100 with an estimated \$10 for shipping, the total cost is \$110. An additional 10% may be added to the cost (\$11) for a total authorized amount of \$121. When the device arrives, the invoice states the total cost of \$115 including

shipping and taxes, which is the amount the SPOE Director can claim for reimbursement.

After determining how to obtain the assistive technology device (i.e., loan, constructing or modifying, purchase), the SPOE Director documents the decision on the SPOE Assistive Technology Pricing Worksheet, which is then filed in the child's paper record. The Service Coordinator is notified that the assistive technology device has been located or ordered.

If applicable, the SPOE Director determines who will enter the assistive technology authorizations into the child's electronic record. When using a loaned device, the SPOE Director does not enter an authorization.

2. Durable Medical Equipment

Some types of assistive technology devices are known as durable medical equipment (DME). The purpose of DME for a young child is to assist the child to participate in daily routines and activities. Some examples of DME may include positioning chairs or wedges, standers, walkers, and adaptive strollers.

According to Medicaid, the definition of DME is equipment that: (1) withstands repeated use, (2) primarily serves as a medical purpose, (3) is not useful to a person in the absence of an illness, medical condition or injury, (4) is appropriate for use in the home, including a relative's home but not a hospital or institution, and (5) requires a physician's prescription.

When using SPOE as Provider in order to obtain assistive technology devices, all DME requirements must be met in order for the DME to be covered by Medicaid. Any device that meets the criteria of DME is entered with the Health Care Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) code of E1399 since MO HealthNet reimburses First Steps for DME devices.

3. Assistive Technology Inventory

The SPOE agency maintains a system of tracking assistive technology purchases, which may include accessing the assistive technology authorization report available in WebSPOE. Additionally, the SPOE Director keeps an inventory list of all assistive technology items maintained and stored by the SPOE, including devices that are loaned, returned or donated. SPOE Directors should share inventory lists with one another so available devices may be used across SPOE regions.

SECTION IV: ACTIVITIES WITH THE STATE AGENCY

DESE employs staff responsible for overseeing the SPOE contract, including a Part C Program Manager, a Program Coordinator, regional Senior Program Specialists and compliance staff. For more information about DESE staff, see Practice Manual Chapter 1: Missouri Infrastructure.

The primary contact for the state agency is the Senior Program Specialist assigned to the region awarded. The Senior Program Specialist provides oversight of the contract through regular interactions with the SPOE Director and training/technical assistance to Service Coordinators and service providers in the region.

A. State Meetings

Through regular meetings with DESE staff, the SPOE Director receives ongoing training and technical assistance about daily operations and contract requirements. DESE provides a minimum of two weeks' notice to the SPOE Director regarding the time, location and date of each meeting. A week before the meeting, DESE sends out the meeting agenda, including the time, location, any documents that need review beforehand, and a list of materials the SPOE Director may need to bring.

1. Initial SPOE Contractor Training

Prior the implementation of a new contract, the SPOE Director attends the initial SPOE contractor training, typically held in June, which includes SPOE operation, recordkeeping and data system training. The initial SPOE contractor training is held in the central Missouri area, usually Jefferson City, for up to five consecutive business days. The length of the initial SPOE contractor training is determined by DESE depending on the needs of the SPOE Contractors and SPOE Directors.

The SPOE Contractor is also invited to attend this training. As permitted by DESE, the SPOE Director may be able to invite additional persons to attend (e.g., Lead Service Coordinator). Travel, lodging and meals are reimbursed by DESE according to state travel guidelines for the required attendees as outlined in the SPOE contract.

2. SPOE Director Meetings

DESE hosts regular meetings for the SPOE Directors to attend to learn new guidance or to share local information with the State. As permitted by DESE, the SPOE may be able to invite additional persons to attend (e.g., Lead Service Coordinator).

Typically DESE hosts two meetings per year in Jefferson City for SPOE Directors. These meetings are usually held in the months of April and September. Travel, lodging and meals are reimbursed by DESE according to state travel guidelines for the required attendees as outlined in the SPOE contract.

DESE hosts two virtual meetings per year for SPOE Directors. These meetings are usually held

in January (to review public reporting data in the federal Annual Performance Report) and in November. DESE may organize additional conference calls throughout the year when necessary to share information with the SPOE Director.

3. Annual SPOE Contractor Training

Prior to the start of each fiscal year, the SPOE Director attends the annual SPOE contractor training, typically held in June, which may include updates to guidance, SPOE operations or data systems. The annual SPOE contractor training is held in the central Missouri area, usually Jefferson City, for up to three consecutive business days. The length of the annual SPOE contractor training is determined by DESE depending on the needs of the SPOE Contractors and SPOE Directors.

The SPOE Contractor is also invited to attend this training. As permitted by DESE, the SPOE Director may be able to invite additional persons to attend (e.g., Lead Service Coordinator). Travel, lodging and meals are reimbursed by DESE according to state travel guidelines for the required attendees as outlined in the SPOE contract.

4. Missouri Early Childhood State Advisory Council

The Missouri Early Childhood State Advisory Council (Council) holds four meetings per year. The meetings are held in Jefferson City with limited seating capacity and also available via live stream. The purpose of the Council meeting is to advise and assist DESE with decisions regarding First Steps and other early care and education programs in Missouri. The council consists of members appointed by the Governor.

The SPOE Director is welcome to attend the Council meetings as an in-person audience member. However, travel, lodging and meals are not reimbursed by DESE.

5. Other State Events

Additional meetings may be required at the discretion of DESE but will not exceed more than five business days annually. For required trainings or meetings, travel, lodging and meals are reimbursed by DESE according to state travel guidelines.

B. Invoices and Reimbursement

The SPOE agency designee submits all invoices to DESE in a timely manner to ensure prompt reimbursement for travel or other expenses. The general guideline for timely submissions is within 60 days from the date of event or services provided.

1. SPOE State Event Invoice

DESE reimburses the SPOE agency for travel expenses to certain events in accordance with contractual requirements. The SPOE agency designee submits the *System Point of Entry (SPOE) State Event Invoice* (see SPOE Administration Manual Forms) to DESE. Reimbursement for mileage, lodging and meals must follow the per diem rates provided in the state travel guidelines.

When the SPOE Contractor, SPOE Director, or other SPOE personnel are invited to attend a First Steps meeting hosted by DESE, such as the SPOE Director meetings or annual contractor trainings, they can be reimbursed for any travel expenses allowed under state travel guidelines.

2. SPOE Monthly Mileage Invoice

The SPOE agency submits the *SPOE Monthly Mileage Invoice* (see SPOE Administration Manual Forms) for reimbursement of SPOE staff travel. The SPOE Director maintains a record of all travel for each staff person on the *SPOE Daily Mileage Log* (see SPOE Administration Manual Forms). The SPOE agency records the mileage for each month for First Steps required activities, including intake and IFSP meeting activities, EIT meeting attendance, child find and public awareness activities. The SPOE Monthly Mileage Invoice does not include travel expenses for state sponsored training or any SPOE agency trainings outside the geographic boundaries of the State of Missouri.

Mileage tracking generally starts at the SPOE staff person's official domicile (e.g., SPOE or home office where staff begin work each day) and ends at a location of a First Steps related activity (not including miles traveled to non-First Steps locations such as lunch, errands, etc.). On the rare occasion that the starting location is different from the official domicile, then SPOE staff start tracking mileage from the starting point that is closest to the First Steps related activity (i.e., starting point or official domicile). If the starting location is farther away from the First Steps activity than the official domicile, then mileage tracking begins at the official domicile (closest starting point).

If SPOE staff start their day somewhere other than the official domicile, staff indicate "no" on the daily mileage log and then enter an explanation in the last column (e.g., start location other than official domicile and list the address of the other location).

If the most direct route of travel for First Steps required activities involves the SPOE staff using a toll bridge, then the toll fee can be reimbursed. When free parking is not available to conduct First Steps activities (due to proximity of the location or for safety reasons), parking fees can be reimbursed. SPOE staff document the cost of any toll or parking fees on the *SPOE Daily Mileage Log* under "Other". The cost of the tolls and parking fees for the month can be added to the total mileage reimbursement cost on the *SPOE Monthly Mileage Invoice* and receipts must be kept on file.

3. SPOE Monthly Contract Invoice

DESE pays the SPOE agency a monthly firm-fixed price to deliver First Steps services in accordance with contractual requirements. The SPOE agency completes the *System Point of*

Entry (SPOE) Monthly Contract Invoice (see SPOE Administration Manual Forms) based on current pricing and personnel information, including vacancies and new hires. The SPOE agency submits this invoice no later than the last business day of the month in which services are delivered.

4. Evaluation Protocols Reimbursement

The SPOE agency is responsible for purchasing the testing protocols used for the evaluation of the child (i.e., the Developmental Assessment of the Young Child – 2nd Edition or DAYC-2). The SPOE agency submits the ***System Point of Entry (SPOE) Testing Protocol Invoice*** (see SPOE Administration Manual Forms) to DESE for reimbursement of DAYC protocols. The number of protocols eligible for reimbursement is estimated each year based on the number of referrals in the region. At the SPOE Contractor training each year, DESE shares the estimated number of protocols allowed for the following fiscal year. The SPOE agency must submit the itemized invoice no later than 60 calendar days after the date of purchase of the protocols.

C. DESE Reports

DESE provides a variety of reports the SPOE Director should access on a regular basis to obtain current information about their specific region or statewide performance. These reports may be accessed in WebSPOE or are posted on the First Steps website. The SPOE Director supervises and manages staff through analyzing data reports provided by DESE or tracked by the SPOE office.

1. WebSPOE Reports

WebSPOE contains a variety of data reports with child, provider and/or Service Coordinator information. Reports are region specific for certain timeframes (e.g., a fiscal year). The SPOE Director may use WebSPOE reports for a variety of purposes, including employee performance monitoring and self-monitoring of compliance indicators.

2. SPOE Data Reports

Each month, DESE sends the SPOE Data Report to the SPOE Directors. The report includes information on referral sources, eligibility, child count by county, and inactivation reasons. The SPOE Director may utilize this information for a variety of purposes, including child find efforts and staff training. A public report of SPOE Data is posted quarterly on the First Steps Data, Budgets and Reports webpage.

3. Annual Performance Report and Public Reporting

DESE submits an Annual Performance Report (APR) to OSEP each January. The APR consists of both compliance and results indicators. The data for compliance indicators are from the annual SPOE compliance monitoring before any corrections have been made by the SPOEs. Prior to submission to OSEP, DESE shares a draft of each region's APR data (i.e., public reporting). The SPOE Director has the opportunity to review the draft public reporting

document for accuracy and provide feedback to DESE.

After DESE submits the APR, OSEP reviews the report and evaluates whether the state is in compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements (i.e., state determination) as one of the following categories: (1) meets IDEA requirements, (2) needs assistance with implementing IDEA requirements, (3) needs intervention with implementing IDEA requirements, or (4) needs substantial intervention with implementing IDEA requirements. In turn, DESE provides each SPOE agency with a designation of compliance (i.e., local determination) using the same categories and based on the regional APR data.

4. Family Survey

Each year, DESE sends a survey to families who are active in the program in an effort to obtain information on the family's experiences in First Steps. DESE posts the statewide results on the First Steps website and sends each SPOE a copy of regional results and comments. The SPOE Director may utilize this information for staff training. Additionally, data from the family survey is reported in the APR.

5. CAPTA Annual Report

Each year, DESE compiles a report on children who are referred to First Steps under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). Under CAPTA, Children's Division must make a referral to First Steps for a child under the age of three who is involved in a substantiated case of abuse or neglect. DESE posts the report on the First Steps Data, Budgets and Reports webpage. The report details the number of CAPTA referrals made to each SPOE region. The SPOE Director may utilize this information for child find efforts and collaborations with Children's Division offices in the region awarded.

6. Newborn Hearing Screening Report

Each year, DESE compiles a report on the number of children with permanent hearing loss, as identified by the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), who were referred to First Steps. DESE posts the report on the First Steps Data, Budget and Reports webpage. The report details the number of children eligible for First Steps, reason for eligibility and early intervention services. The SPOE Director may utilize this information for child find efforts.

D. Data Collection

The SPOE Director collects and sends certain data to DESE in order to support various state partners in the compilation of required federal and/or state reporting activities.

1. Missouri First Steps Semi-Annual Certification for Medicaid

Since the Department of Social Services – MO HealthNet Division helps pay for First Steps service coordination as part of Administrative Case Management (ACM), the SPOE Director attests all 100% of the Service Coordinators and other SPOE staff time was spent on First Steps

activities.

The Missouri First Steps Semi-Annual Certification for ACM is prepared at least semi-annually, signed by a supervisor with first-hand knowledge of the work performed by the individual, and dated after the funding period. The certification is submitted to DESE within 30 days from the last business day of the month in which services are delivered.

2. Annual National Child Count of Children and Youth who are Deafblind

Each December, the Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project prepares for a federal report identifying the number of children with combined vision and hearing loss in Missouri. The SPOE Director will be contacted by the Missouri School for the Blind to complete a census form identifying children within the region who have combined vision and hearing loss.

Children may be added to the census if the SPOE Director received information that indicates or suspects a presence of a vision and hearing loss. These children may stay on the census for one year. If official documentation is not secured by the SPOE Director within that year, then the child will be removed from the census the following year.

The SPOE Director should return all completed census forms by February 1 to the Missouri School for the Blind. For more information on Service Coordinator responsibilities, see Practice Manual Chapter 3.

3. Blind Registry

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) provides adapted educational materials to eligible children who meet the definition of blindness. An annual registration of eligible students determines a per capita amount of money designated for the purchase of educational materials produced by the APH. For more information from the APH, see SPOE Administration Manual Links.

The Missouri School for the Blind assists the APH in the annual data collection for the registry. Each December, the SPOE Director is sent a registration packet to assist the APH in identifying all children within the region who meet the definition of blindness. The SPOE Director ensures a Release of Information is signed by the parent before any identifying information is shared with the APH.

The SPOE Director should return all completed registration packets by February 1 to the Missouri School for the Blind. For more information on Service Coordinator responsibilities, see Practice Manual Chapter 3.

4. Newborn Hearing Screening

DHSS collects information on the number of children with permanent hearing loss within the state. DESE assists DHSS in the collecting this data as part of a state interagency agreement. The SPOE Director or Service Coordinator identifies any child with diagnosed permanently hearing loss. The SPOE may utilize the *ICD-10 Coding System for Missouri First Steps*

document (see Practice Manual Chapter 3 Documents) to help determine children in this category.

As soon as possible after the completion of the Initial IFSP meeting (i.e., within three to five business days), the SPOE Director emails confirmation of parental consent and only the child's identification number to DESE at: speddata@dese.mo.gov.

Immediately following confirmation from the SPOE (i.e., within three to five business days), DESE sends DHSS the child's name, ID number, date of birth, referral date, and Initial IFSP date. DESE maintains a list of names submitted by the SPOE and shared with DHSS throughout the calendar year. For more information on Service Coordinator responsibilities, see Practice Manual Chapter 3.

E. Calendar of Events

The following calendar can assist the SPOE Director in managing the various required events/activities and timelines:

SPOE Administration Calendar (All dates are approximate and subject to change)

JANUARY	FEBRUARY
Virtual SPOE Director Meeting	Due Deaf/Blind and Blind Registries
Due ACM Bi-Annual Report	Submit Invoices: Contract and Mileage
Submit Invoices: Contract and Mileage	Submit Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
Submit Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*	Submit Newborn Hearing Information
Submit Newborn Hearing Information*	

MARCH

- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

APRIL

- In-Person** SPOE Director Meeting
- Due** Draft Needs Assessment Report
- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Draft Needs Assessment Report
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

MAY

- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

JUNE

- In-Person** Contractor Training
- Due** Final Needs Assessment Report
- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Final Needs Assessment Report
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

JULY

- Due** ACM Bi-Annual Report
- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

AUGUST

- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Testing Protocol, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

SEPTEMBER

- In-Person** SPOE Director Meeting
- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

NOVEMBER

- Virtual** SPOE Director Meeting
- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

OCTOBER

- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

DECEMBER

- Due** Needs Assessment Plan
- Submit** Invoices: Contract and Mileage
- Submit** Invoices: Temporary Personnel, Testing Protocol or State Event*
- Submit** Proposed Needs Assessment Plan
- Submit** Newborn Hearing Information*

* If applicable

SECTION V: ACTIVITIES WITH PROVIDERS IN THE REGION

Early intervention services are delivered by providers who meet DESE's qualifications. The SPOE Director develops and maintains a system of provider recruitment to ensure there are a sufficient number of providers available throughout the region. The SPOE Director should refer potential providers to the CFO to enroll as First Steps providers. All providers enroll as individuals who are independent vendors or affiliated with a provider agency. The SPOE Director documents all provider recruitment efforts.

The SPOE Director establishes a process to inform enrolled providers about policies, procedures and practices related to the First Steps philosophy and transdisciplinary model of service delivery.

The SPOE Director works with the Senior Program Specialist to discuss provider issues and training needs, including topics not related to an existing training activity, module, or guidance document. The SPOE Director coordinates the delivery of provider training with the Senior Program Specialist. The SPOE Director consults with the Senior Program Specialist before using training materials that are not developed or endorsed by DESE.

A. Early Intervention Teams

First Steps utilizes a transdisciplinary approach to IFSP service provision referred to as Early Intervention Teams (EIT), which includes members from the following disciplines: Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Service Coordination, Speech/Language Pathology and Special Instruction.

The SPOE Director, or other designee, is responsible for creating teams, including assigning and removing providers from a team when needed. To ensure each required discipline is represented, the composition of an EIT may include a combination of part-time and full-time positions, independent and agency providers, varying caseloads and providers who serve multiple SPOE regions. The SPOE Director may choose to utilize a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the providers selected for teams to ensure providers have an understanding of and follow the EIT guidelines, including the usage of the primary provider, supporting provider, joint visits, and regularly scheduled EIT meetings.

For more information about provider teams, see Practice Manual Chapter 7: EIT.

B. Early Intervention Examiners

DESE identified the DAYC-2 as the uniform instrument to address statewide consistency in using a standardized evaluation tool, reporting results and determining eligibility for children referred to First Steps with developmental delays. Based on the number of referrals in the region, the SPOE Director identifies the number of enrolled providers necessary to be trained in order to administer

the DAYC-2 as part of the evaluation of the child. Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Speech/Language Pathologists and Special Instructors from the EIT may be selected to become Early Intervention (EI) Examiners. For more information about evaluation of the child, see Practice Manual Chapter 3: Referral, Intake and Evaluation.

Once a provider is identified by the SPOE Director, the provider is invited to a DESE training conducted by a Senior Program Specialist. In the training, the provider learns about First Steps eligibility determination, how to administer and score DAYC-2 protocols, and the DESE guidelines for writing and submitting an evaluation report. The SPOE Director is encouraged to attend every DAYC-2 training.

After completing the DESE training, the provider receives a certificate of attendance and the Senior Program Specialist submits the provider's name to the CFO. The CFO assigns the EI Examiner credential to the provider's account. The provider should practice administering and scoring the DAYC-2 before receiving an authorization to administer the DAYC- 2 for a child in First Steps.

The SPOE Director ensures EI Examiners are following the DESE ***DAYC-2 Guidelines for Writing the Report*** (see Service Provider Manual Chapter 3: Evaluation and Assessment) by routinely checking to ensure completed protocols are returned to the SPOE after testing, the provider's scoring of the protocols is accurate, and the report is written according to the DESE guidelines. If the SPOE Director identifies an EI Examiner that is not being utilized or is no longer needed in the region, then the SPOE Director notifies the Senior Program Specialist to remove the EI Examiner credential from the provider's account.

C. SPOE As Provider

As outlined in the SPOE contract, the SPOE agency may deliver early intervention services via sub-contracting using a function referred to as SPOE as Provider. At the time the SPOE agency is awarded the contract, the SPOE agency enrolls as a provider agency in order to deliver services under SPOE as Provider.

In instances where the SPOE agency utilizes this function, the SPOE Director ensures the sub-contracted provider meets qualifications for the early intervention service provider type as described in the ***Personnel Standards for First Steps Providers*** (see Service Provider Manual Chapter 1 Documents). DESE reimburses SPOE as Provider at the same rate for the early intervention service provider type as described in the ***Provider Rates Schedule*** (see Service Provider Manual Chapter 9 Documents).

When providing services under SPOE as Provider, the SPOE agency is essentially the provider administrator, which means the SPOE agency is responsible for ensuring the service is delivered in accordance with the IFSP, proper recordkeeping to document the service delivered, and claim entry for payment.

When using SPOE as Provider, if the service location allows for mileage to be reimbursed, then the sub-contracted provider may be paid mileage in addition to the service. After the sub-contracted provider completes services, the SPOE agency can submit a claim for services under the Provider Account Management in WebSPOE.

The SPOE agency must follow all policies for providers as outlined in the Service Provider Manual when using the SPOE as Provider function.

D. Offline Billing, Fund Recovery and FCP Corrections

The offline billing and fund recovery process is used to make corrections to provider billing and payments only after all other alternatives for billing in WebSPOE have been exhausted. Additionally, occasional errors or questions occur with Family Cost Participation (FCP) accounts that need to be addressed. The SPOE Director is responsible for supporting Service Coordinators and providers in how to complete the following processes in a timely manner. Offline billing requests initially submitted a year or more from the date of service will not be processed.

1. Services and Evaluations/Assessments

A provider may require offline billing when the service provided, including evaluations and assessments, cannot be entered or claimed via WebSPOE (e.g., the provider waited too long to claim or the authorization for service was entered incorrectly). For offline billing requests related to provider service, evaluations and assessments, the provider or payee submits the **Offline Billing Request** (see Service Provider Manual Chapter 9) to the Senior Program Specialist.

If a provider or payee has made a billing error and funds need to be reclaimed, the SPOE can direct the provider to Service Provider Manual Chapter 9 or a Senior Program Specialists for assistance.

2. EIT and IFSP Meetings

When the Service Coordinator makes an error in recording attendance for EIT or IFSP meetings (i.e., a provider was not paid or a provider was overpaid), the Service Coordinator or SPOE must submit the correction to the Senior Program Specialist. The correction must include the following information and documentation:

- Service Coordinator Name
- Meeting Type (EIT or IFSP Meeting)
- Meeting Date
- Child ID (*for IFSP Meeting Only*)
- Provider Name
- Provider Payee
- Reason for the Correction
- Number of Units (*must indicate whether to pay or to reclaim*)

- Total Charges (*must indicate whether to pay or to reclaim*)
- Copy of the EIT or IFSP Meeting Attendance page from WebSPOE
- Copy of the EIT Meeting Sign-In sheet or IFSP Meeting Signature page (if applicable)
- Copy of any additional relevant documentation

3. Family Member Transportation

A parent or family member may require offline billing assistance when family member transportation submissions cannot be processed by the CFO (e.g., due to delays in enrolling as a transportation provider or the authorization for mileage was not entered timely). For offline billing requests related to family member transportation, the Service Coordinator assists the parent or family member in submitting the ***Transportation Billing Form*** (see Practice Manual Chapter 8) to a Senior Program Specialist.

4. Family Cost Participation

In the event of Family Cost Participation questions or errors, the SPOE Director assists the Service Coordinator and family in understanding and correcting the issues. The SPOE Director may work with the Senior Program Specialist and the CFO to resolve concerns.

SECTION VI: FIRST STEPS COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

As part of SPOE operations, there may be parents, providers or Service Coordinators who want to report a concern or file a complaint regarding an issue that occurred in First Steps. The SPOE Director, with assistance from the Senior Program Specialist for the assigned region, identifies and resolves any problems regarding the operation in the region. Depending on the situation, the SPOE Director would follow one of these procedures: IDEA dispute resolution, provider complaint or billing complaint.

A. IDEA Dispute Resolution

For instances that involve complaints related to the federal and state regulations (e.g., lack of parental consent for services, late timelines, breach of confidentiality), the SPOE Director gathers information to determine if the situation needs to be resolved using the IDEA Dispute Resolutions described below.

1. Child Complaint

Anyone can file a complaint regarding a concern that DESE, the SPOE or an enrolled First Steps provider violated a required procedure of Part C of IDEA.

- **Timeline:** Within one year of the alleged violation occurring.
- **Method to file:** In writing. Recommend using the DESE First Steps Child Complaint Model Form on the DESE website to ensure required information is included.
- **Person who investigates:** Part C compliance staff at DESE.
- **Decision issued by:** The Commissioner of Education or designee. The decision is final.
- **Retention:** The SPOE must maintain child's record for 10 years after the final decision. DESE must maintain child complaint documentation for 10 years after the final decision.

2. Due Process Hearing

The parent (or parent's attorney) may file a request for a due process hearing due to a dispute over a decision made by DESE, SPOE, or provider regarding the identification (eligibility), evaluation, location, or the delivery of services to the child and family.

- **Timeline:** Within one year of the alleged violation occurring.
- **Method to file:** In writing. Recommend using the DESE First Steps Due Process Hearing Parent Request Model Form on the DESE website to ensure required information is included.
- **Person who presides over the hearing:** A hearing officer. DESE does not investigate.
- **Decision issued by:** The hearing officer makes findings based on facts in the case and gives a ruling. Any party aggrieved by the findings and decision has the right to bring

a civil action in state or federal court.

- **Retention:** The SPOE must maintain child's record for 15 years after the final decision. DESE must maintain due process information for 15 years after the final decision.

3. Mediation

Any party involved in the dispute can file, including a parent or parent's attorney regarding a disagreement involving any matter under Part C of IDEA.

- **Timeline:** No filing timeline
- **Method to file:** In writing. Recommend using the DESE First Steps Mediation Request Model Form on the DESE website to ensure required information is included. Usually filed in conjunction with a Child Complaint or Due Process Hearing request.
- **Person who facilitates:** A trained, qualified mediator agreed upon by both parties. DESE does not review.
- **Decision written by:** The participating parties. If the mediation is successful, a legally binding agreement is written, signed by the parent and a representative of DESE, and implemented. If the mediation is not successful, the parties may initiate, or continue with, a child complaint or due process hearing.
- **Retention:** The SPOE must maintain child's record for 10 years for mediation agreements related to a child complaint, and 15 years for mediation agreements related to a due process hearing. DESE must maintain information pertaining to a mediation agreement for 10 years if the mediation was related to a child complaint, and 15 years if the mediation agreement was related to a due process hearing.

B. Provider Complaints

For instances that involve complaints related to provider practices (e.g., concerns with provider professionalism, boundaries, ethics), the SPOE Director gathers information to determine if the situation needs to be resolved using the Provider Complaints process described below.

The complaint may be made by either a parent, Service Coordinator, SPOE Director, CFO or another service provider.

- **Timeline:** Within one year of the concern occurring.
- **Method to report:** A written statement submitted to the SPOE. The statement should include: the name of the provider, date of the concern, who shared the concern and how (e.g., phone call, email), the name of the child in First Steps, a brief explanation of the concern, and the outcome.
- **Person who investigates:** The SPOE Director.
- **Decision issued by:** The SPOE agency. If the provider disagrees, the provider may request DESE review the SPOE agency's decision.
- **Retention:** Provider Complaints should be filed alphabetically by the provider's last name. The SPOE agency should maintain provider complaints for a minimum of one year from the report in case this complaint becomes a billing problem, child complaint or due process

hearing. The SPOE agency is not required to maintain provider complaints older than five years.

The SPOE agency should develop internal procedures for handling provider complaints. When a complaint is made about a provider's practice, the SPOE Director documents the concern in a provider complaints file maintained at the SPOE office and accessible to the general public.

➤ **Provider Complaints File**

The SPOE Director informs families that the SPOE office maintains a file of complaints regarding service providers. The SPOE Director should create a template to document provider complaints. The template should contain the following requirements outlined in the SPOE contract:

- Provider name
- Date of complaint/concern
- Complaint/concern reported by
- Method of complaint/concern
- Name of the child in First Steps
- Explanation of complaint/concern
- Outcome of the review of the complaint/concern

When the SPOE Director receives a request to access the provider complaint file, the amount of information shared depends on who made the request. Upon request by the general public, which includes First Steps providers, the SPOE Director must remove personally identifiable information before making the provider complaint file available for review. If the requestor is the parent of the child in First Steps, then the parent has access to the provider complaint file; however, the parent can review only the personally identifiable information related to their child in First Steps. DESE staff and SPOE agency staff have access to the provider complaint file containing personally identifiable information.

The SPOE Director may choose to maintain two provider complaint files, one with personally identifiable information and one without. For more information about confidentiality and personally identifiable information, see Practice Manual Chapter 2: Parental Rights.

C. Billing Complaints

For instances that involve complaints related to billing (e.g., the family was not home on a date the provider billed, the provider billed for more time than the length of the visit), the SPOE Director gathers information to determine if the situation needs to be resolved using Billing Complaints process described below.

When there is a concern with a provider's billing or payment, the issue should be reported to DESE

for investigation. A billing complaint may be made by either a parent, Service Coordinator, SPOE Director, CFO or another provider.

- **Timeline:** Within one year of the date of service.
- **Method to report:** The person filing the billing complaint must provide the child's name, county where the child resides, provider name, description of the billing issue, person reporting the issue and relationship to the child. Billing complaints can be reported in two ways:
 - Via public access using the *Report a Billing Issue* button in the WebSPOE.
 - From inside a child's electronic record in WebSPOE, under the *Services Provided* tab.
- **Person who investigates:** A Senior Program Specialist.
- **Decision issued by:** The Part C Program Manager. The decision is final. If the provider disagrees, the provider may file a civil action in court to request payment for services.
- **Retention:** DESE maintains billing complaints for a minimum of five years from the date of the report. If the report is for a SPOE as Provider, then the SPOE agency must maintain documentation of the provider's delivered service for five years as financial records.

SECTION VII: COMPLIANCE MONITORING PROCEDURES

The state conducts compliance monitoring of SPOE regions in order to verify services are delivered to families in accordance with state regulations and fiscal monitoring of SPOE mileage claims. All 10 SPOE agencies are monitored annually for compliance with state and federal regulations using the Standards and Indicators. A monthly fiscal review of selected SPOE agencies mileage claims is conducted to review billing practices.

A. Annual Standards and Indicators Review

The compliance monitoring involves two aspects of the Standards and Indicators: APR and non-APR indicators. All 10 SPOE agencies are monitored on the following APR indicators: timely services, 45-day timeline, timely transition plan with steps and services, timely Local Educational Agency (LEA) notification, and transition conference timeline. In addition, some activities directly related to these five APR indicators are monitored annually (e.g., Notice of Action/Consent to initiate services, ROI).

The non-APR indicators are selected based on a review of statewide and/or regional data. The type and number of non-APR indicators are subject to change each year (e.g., eligibility determination, consent to use insurance).

1. File Selection

Each fiscal year, First Steps Compliance staff use reports in WebSPOE to select records to review for active Service Coordinators in the SPOE agency. Records may be selected randomly or based on a review of statewide and/or regional data. Compliance staff selects at least one record for each Service Coordinator, allowing a minimum of six months between the Service Coordinator's enrollment date and the action being monitored. In regions with less than 10 Service Coordinators, a Service Coordinator may have more than one record selected.

2. Monitoring Information

In July of each year, DESE provides the SPOE Director a list of the files selected for monitoring, a corresponding documentation request and a monitoring letter via the Improvement Monitoring Accountability and Compliance System (IMACS 2). IMACS 2 is a web-based system used to record and track compliance monitoring data. This database includes monitoring results, correspondence between Compliance staff and SPOEs, Individual child Corrective Action Plans (ICAPs), Corrective Action Plans (CAPs), and verification of correction of noncompliance. Also, IMACS 2 generates various monitoring reports.

When the SPOE Director receives the July monitoring information, the monitoring process begins for that year. After receipt of the monitoring information, the SPOE Director should not make any corrections to documentation in the files selected for review.

3. Monitoring Tool

The Standards and Indicators is the tool used by Compliance staff during a compliance monitoring. The Standards and Indicators are populated in IMACS 2.

4. Desk Review

Each year Compliance staff conduct a desk review of information in the child's electronic record and/or the child's paper record. While desk reviews are generally conducted for the annual compliance monitoring, an onsite review may occur for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to: the SPOE agency has longstanding noncompliance with a particular indicator, noncompliance that cannot be corrected and verified within 12 months, local determination status, high turnover or a high number of complaints (e.g., child complaints, due process).

During monitoring, information in the record is compared to the Standards and Indicators requirements in order to determine if the activity, or documentation of the action, is in compliance with federal and state regulations.

If the SPOE agency had a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) on any indicator from the previous monitoring, then any document or action for that indicator that was completed prior to the CAP training date is excluded from the desk review. If prior to receiving the July monitoring information the SPOE Director corrected noncompliance and provided documentation of the correction, Compliance staff may choose not to make a finding. If information is missing from the record, Compliance staff contacts the SPOE Director for clarification in order to determine if noncompliance is present.

When information in the record does not align with the requirements in the Standards and Indicators, it is considered noncompliance. The corrective action depends upon the extent of noncompliance.

a) Isolated Noncompliance

If the noncompliance represents an isolated incident (i.e., 80 to 99 percent compliance on an indicator), then the SPOE has an opportunity to correct the instance prior to a finding being issued. Compliance staff contacts the SPOE Director and the SPOE Director has the opportunity to immediately correct the indicator prior to the issuing of the Part C Compliance Monitoring report. Consistent with OSEP Memorandum 09-02, to correct the indicator, the SPOE Director has to complete two levels of correction: (1) Child level - the SPOE Director corrects the noncompliance in the individual child record, and (2) SPOE level - the SPOE Director submits additional files to demonstrate compliance with the indicator.

If the SPOE Director is able to demonstrate two levels of correction, then no finding and no corrective action will be issued for the indicator. If the additional files do not demonstrate compliance with the indicator, then a finding and a corrective action will be required for the indicator.

b) Extensive Noncompliance

If the noncompliance is found to be extensive (i.e., 79% or less compliance on an indicator), then a finding is issued and a corrective action will be required for that indicator. The SPOE Director will not have an opportunity to correct these instances prior to issuing the Part C Compliance Monitoring report.

5. Entrance Information and Exit Conference

Compliance staff provide entrance information via email and/or conference call with the SPOE Director to review the purpose and scope of the monitoring. An exit conference call is held with each SPOE to discuss preliminary monitoring findings.

6. Interviews

Compliance monitoring may also include interviews of personnel in each region. The SPOE Director, Service Coordinators and providers may be interviewed to provide additional information regarding SPOE processes.

7. Correspondence and Reports

The Part C Compliance Monitoring report is the report officially notifying the SPOE Contractor and SPOE Director of any findings of noncompliance. The SPOE Contractor and SPOE Director will receive the Part C Compliance Monitoring report via IMACS 2. The report contains:

- The report letter
- Compliance Status of Indicators Reviewed Report
- Corrective Action Plan (CAP), if applicable

Once the Part C Compliance Monitoring report is sent, the SPOE Director can access the following additional reports in IMACS 2:

- **Child File Review Summary.** This is a lengthy report that shows *all* results for *every* child's file.
- **Individual Child File Reviews.** This is a summary of all "yes", "no", and "N/A" results for each indicator. It gives an overall percentage for each indicator and is helpful to the SPOE Director in analyzing problem areas.
- **Noncompliance Summary, if applicable.** This contains *all* items of identified noncompliance (i.e., only the no results). The report includes:
 - the child's name
 - the name of the Service Coordinator
 - the indicators out of compliance
 - the Individual Student Correction

- notes regarding the indicator

On the Noncompliance Summary, one of four options will be shown in the Individual Student Correction column: (1) Individual Correction Required, (2) No Individual Correction Required (shown when there is no ICAP but a CAP is required), (3) No Individual Correction Required: child no longer in First Steps, or (4) No Individual Correction Required: child is deceased.

8. Verification Review

Verification Review is the process the SPOE Director completes to clear any ICAPs and CAPs issued to the SPOE agency due to noncompliance identified during the compliance monitoring. Consistent with OSEP Memorandum 09-02, there are two levels of correction necessary to verify correction of any noncompliance identified in the Part C Compliance Monitoring report:

a) Child Level

Verification of correction of each instance of individual child noncompliance through an ICAP, unless the child is no longer within the jurisdiction of the SPOE region.

b) SPOE Level

Verification of correction that the SPOE is correctly implementing the specific regulatory requirements (i.e., achieve 100% compliance) through a review of five new files.

ICAPs are required for all findings of individual child noncompliance when the child is still active in the SPOE region. ICAP Guidelines are provided in IMACS 2 with each ICAP. ICAPs are cleared when the SPOE Director provides new documentation that the activity found out of compliance has been corrected and is in compliance.

CAPs are required for any indicator with a “no” result in the Part C Compliance Monitoring report. Initially, the SPOE Director writes a plan for each indicator with a CAP and submits the plan to Compliance staff via IMACS 2. When writing the plan, the SPOE Director should consider the extent of the training needed. Depending on the extent of the noncompliance, Compliance staff may require specific training to occur as part of the CAP. Example CAPs may include:

- The SPOE Director discussing the indicator with the Service Coordinator found out on the indicator
- The SPOE Director reviewing new files to ensure correction has occurred
- A SPOE-wide training with the Senior Program Specialist and SPOE Director
- Review or revision of a SPOE practice

Through IMACS, the SPOE Director is able to communicate with Compliance staff regarding the status of correction for a specific indicator. If documentation submitted for the CAP is found out of compliance during the Verification Review, an ICAP will be required, if

applicable. New documentation will continue to be reviewed on that indicator, until 100% compliance is demonstrated. This may include the identification of new noncompliance not related to the original indicator.

If noncompliance continues to be identified, either during the annual desk review or Verification Review, Compliance staff may conduct an onsite monitoring.

9. Clearing Corrective Action Plans

CAPs are cleared when the SPOE Director provides documentation from new files that demonstrate compliance with that indicator.

The SPOE Director may provide new documentation individually for each CAP indicator or submit documentation for all CAP indicators at the same time. Additionally, documentation from one child's file may be submitted to correct multiple indicators. For example, if two indicators on a Notice of Action/Consent (NOA/C) for Initiation of EI Services (e.g., reason for the action and date of notice) are out of compliance, then one NOA/C for Initiation of EI Services can be submitted for both indicators.

If documentation is found out of compliance during the Verification Review, an ICAP will be required, if applicable. This may include the identification of new noncompliance not related to the original indicator. For any noncompliance identified, the SPOE will continue to submit new documentation to be reviewed on that indicator, until 100% compliance is shown.

All noncompliance, ICAPs and CAPs, should be corrected as soon as possible, but must be corrected within 12 months from the date of notification of noncompliance (i.e., date of the Part C Compliance Monitoring report). Once the SPOE Director has corrected all noncompliance at 100% (i.e., all documentation sent in for Verification Review is in compliance), the SPOE Contractor and SPOE Director receive a letter via IMACS 2 confirming the SPOE agency is in compliance with state and federal regulations and the monitoring is complete.

B. General Timeline for Annual Compliance Monitoring

Below is a general timeline of the annual First Steps Compliance Monitoring Process:

Annual Compliance Monitoring Timeline *(All dates are approximate and subject to change)*

APRIL

Schedule Monitoring Compliance staff confirms the monitoring schedule with the SPOE Directors.

MAY - JUNE

File Selection Compliance staff reviews the names and enrollment dates of all active Service Coordinators in each SPOE and selects files for the monitoring.

JULY

Monitoring Information Compliance staff sends the SPOE Director the monitoring letter, a list of children's records to be monitored and the documentation from the records to be provided to Compliance staff via IMACS 2. This begins the monitoring process. Documentation is due to Compliance staff as indicated in the monitoring letter.

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER

Conduct Monitoring Each SPOE's monitoring may include:

- Desk review of records
- Entrance conference
- Interviews
- Exit conference

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER

Part C Compliance Monitoring Report Report for each region is available to the corresponding SPOE Director. Individual child corrective actions (ICAPs) and corrective action plans (CAPs) are available to SPOE Director in IMACS 2.

OCTOBER - DECEMBER

CAP Due If applicable, within 30 days after receipt of the Part C Compliance Monitoring report, a training plan is due in IMACS 2 from the SPOE Director. This begins the Verification Review process.

ICAPs Due If applicable, within 60 days after receipt of the Part C Compliance Monitoring report, all individual child corrective actions are due in IMACS 2 from the SPOE Director.

DECEMBER - JANUARY

Complete CAP Training and Submit New Documentation

Verification Review process continues. The steps include:

1. SPOE Director completes training plan.
2. SPOE Director submits new documentation to Compliance staff for review.
3. Compliance staff reviews documentation until 100% compliance is demonstrated and all ICAPS and CAPs are cleared.

Compliance staff sends the SPOE Director the CAP letter via IMACS 2 indicating all CAPs are cleared and the monitoring process is complete.

Reminder: CAPs should be cleared as soon as possible but must be cleared no later than 12 months from receipt of Part C Compliance Monitoring report.

C. SPOE Monthly Mileage Review

DESE reimburses SPOE agencies for mileage to perform First Steps activities according to Section IV. Invoices and Reimbursement and SPOE contractual requirements. All travel associated with First Steps required activities for each staff person is recorded on the **SPOE Daily Mileage Log** and kept on file by the SPOE Director. The **SPOE Monthly Mileage Invoice** is submitted to DESE at the end of each month for mileage reimbursement at the state mileage rate.

Compliance staff randomly selects SPOE regions on the first business day of each month for mileage review. SPOEs chosen for mileage review receive an email request for mileage logs that are two months in arrears and have ten business days to respond. For example, mileage logs from the month of May would be reviewed in July.

Utilizing Google Maps, Compliance staff review mileage logs to ensure all requirements are documented accurately in accordance with state guidelines. If logs are incomplete, such as missing dates or discrepancies, the SPOE Director receives an email request for complete logs. The SPOE Director has ten business days to provide additional documentation. For any mileage that cannot be verified on Google Maps, Compliance staff check the complete mileage logs for an explanation (e.g. road construction, accidents, hazardous weather, etc.).

Mileage monitoring for a designated month is generally completed and the SPOE Director notified of the results by the end of that same month. If mileage is found reasonable, the SPOE receives a results letter denoting a “Pass” and no follow up is required. Mileage that is found unreasonable receives a results letter denoting a “Fail” along with a summary of the review.

A final conclusion resulting in *Fail* occurs when:

- Mileage logs were requested but no response was received from the SPOE within ten days from the date of request.

- The SPOE responded to a request for mileage logs but did not respond to the follow-up for additional explanation within ten days from the date of request.
- After review, Compliance determined mileage was unreasonable. Reasonable mileage is defined within 10% of Google Maps. For example, if the SPOE staff traveled 50 miles and Google Maps lists 45 miles as the direct route, this would be considered reasonable.

Final conclusions resulting in *Fail* are subject to fund recovery if mileage logs did not substantiate that the mileage was reasonable and funds have not been recovered at the time the investigation is complete. In the final conclusion letter, the SPOE Director will be directed to contact the CFO to establish repayment arrangements. Repayment may be in the form of a check from the SPOE or a recoupment of funds from the next mileage reimbursement check.

When a SPOE receives a failed mileage review, the following corrective actions are taken:

- All findings and any trends in SPOE practices is documented.
- Technical assistance is provided by the Senior Program Specialist to the SPOE Director regarding mileage tracking or billing practices.
- Follow-up monitoring occurs in instances where the SPOE Region had significant billings issues or demonstrated difficulty with mileage tracking.